

Good Morning/Afternoon ,

My name is Zeraiah Ramos and I currently live in Storrs where I attend the University of Connecticut. I am a senior graduating this May studying Sociology and minoring in Urban and Community Studies AND I'm also the Political Education Associate at Hearing Youth Voices.

Now that I'm done with my introduction I would like to pay attention to why we are here today. We are redefining the roles of SRO's and changing narratives. We as a collective are fighting with great strength and passion to protect and advocate for the future. We as a collective believe there is great work to be done when it comes to showing up for our youth. And that is why we will not back down.

The one thing I can understand in my studies as a sociology student is that there are a lot of barriers from our history's past that still linger today to affect people that look like me. It is undeniable that our nation has a problem with its system of policing and we the people who are affected by it are offering our solutions. SRO's are primarily in urbanized schools in the state of Connecticut. I can confirm this to be true because I went to one of those urbanized schools in this state where I saw first hand the effect of SRO's being with Black and Latinx students. The percentage of Black students arrested was over SEVENTEEN times as high in schools with SRO's and the percentage of Latinx students was over TEN times as high with SRO's in school. Are these numbers not alarming? These numbers are telling me we are complacent, perpetuating the system of this nation that chooses to mass incarcerate Black and Latinx individuals.

My hometown growing up had a great example of this inequality when I attended a couple years ago. There were two high schools in my hometown that were directly next to each other. The Magnet building and the regular high school building . Even though I attended Science and Tech I seen the inequality with police presence because there were only officers in the regular building and not in the Magnet building and it comes as no surprise that many of the students from the Magnet building were white students from other districts and the regular high school had predominantly Black and Latinx youth. The number of suspensions and expulsions were much higher in the regular school and it could even be described as prison-like. Students in school suspensions would sit in the room with no windows in a room for hours expected to not speak and could only eat cold lunch, this never sat right with me. It reminded me of jail. When I had classes at the regular high school there were SRO's on the regular floor always monitoring. At times I felt so uncomfortable to use the bathroom at the regular school because I knew a SRO would be there to watch my every move so I would wait to go to the bathroom at the Magnet School. It was not because I was ever doing anything but I was taught at a young age to be fearful and to be hypervigilant with the police, like many black and latinx youth are told at a young age. The magnet school always flourished in comparison because they had more

resources, no policing, and actual opportunities that were never offered at the regular high school. There are so many other instances that happened that shouldn't have and this is not okay.

The solution to this is care not criminalization. The solution to this is more mental support services and funding for more social workers and psychologists. The solution to this is community care and support. The solution to this is not repeating history and understanding that police don't stop violent acts from happening... no the things that stop violent acts from happening are affordable healthcare, opportunities for young people, mental health services, guaranteed income, and community wellness. I ask today to build on these solutions in order for us to see positive change and rebuild relationships in our schools that are broken.